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## CONSUMERS PERCEPTION TOWARD COMMERCIAL MILK LABELLED WITH DIFFERENT QUALITY SEALS

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On the Italian retail market different milk quality seals are used to communicate consumers specific features linked to milk origin and to the production practices employed along the entire supply chain, from farms to dairy companies. In this research, we evaluated consumers perception toward four different milk labels: high-quality conventional milk (HQ), high-quality milk labelled as “mountain milk” (MM), “extended shelf life” conventional milk (ESL), and ESL milk labelled as “hay milk” (HM). Each respondent evaluated just one type of milk, following a randomized design, and evaluations were given either before and after receiving information about the type of milk assigned. Between-treatment (*milk label*) and within-treatment (*before* and *after info*) comparisons were tested by mixed ANOVA and Tukey’s post hoc tests. Results showed that no differences were found between HQ, MM and HM, neither before or after *info*. Regarding within-treatment comparisons for these milk labels, *info* had a significant effect on consumers perception, since quality perception after info was significantly higher than before info. Actually, the info treatment improved perception of healthiness for HQ, MM and HM, naturalness for HQ and HM, suitability to daily consumption for HQ and MM, plus tastiness and willingness to pay for MM. These results suggested that currently few knowledge about these milk labels exists among milk buyers, highlighting the importance of giving consumers proper information as a tool to improve their awareness to valorise and differentiate milk products on the market. On the other hand, the *info* treatment did not improve any of the evaluated parameters for ESL milk, which was perceived as less natural and less tasty when compared to the other milk labels, and even as less healthy and poorer in valuable nutrients after *info*. This result suggested that respondents’ perception toward ESL milk was worse than for the other milk types due to the production practice employed, which implies the pasteurization treatment of milk at higher temperatures than conventional ones, even if no evidence of lower quality for ESL milk was given. Interestingly, the information about the ESL practice did not influence consumers perception in the same way when the milk type evaluated was labelled as “hay milk”.